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DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

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WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: August 22, 2007

No Rapprochement with BZOe

11. Speaking on ORF television on Tuesday, Freedom Party boss Heinz-Christian Strache ruled out a rapprochement or teaming-up of his party with the FP0e spin-off BZOe. Strache also announced that he and the Freedom Party would "certainly run" in the Carinthian provincial elections. The province needed a "genuine down-to-earth party," Strache underscored. All Austrian media report on Freedom Party boss Heinz-Christian Strache's appearance yesterday on ORF television's traditional political summer interview Sommergespraeche. According to semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung, Strache presented an affidavit stating that his party and the FP0e's spin-off BZOe would "not form a political platform with the FP0e." He also reiterated the Freedom Party's restrictive course on immigration, saying that migrants or asylum seekers in Austria "who have committed a criminal offense should be deported." Mass-circulation daily Kurier, analyzing the two Carinthian governor Joerg "Haider imitators" Peter Westenthaler from the BZOe (who appeared on Sommergespraeche earlier this month) and FP0e boss Strache, suggests that the latter is "better at playing the populist policy game." Strache, the Kurier explains, keeps claiming that he is the one who Austria's "political movers and shakers want out of the way;" he is the "politician who dares put his finger on the real problems."

Number of New Citizens Declines

12. According to Austrian media, a sharp drop in the number of naturalized Austrian citizens was caused by the country's stricter immigration laws. Only 7,800 persons acquired citizenship in the first half of this year. According to figures released on Tuesday by Statistics Austria this is a decline of over 53 percent from the same period in 2006 when the figure was almost 16,800. Reporting on the sharp drop in the number of naturalized Austrian citizens this year because of the country's stricter immigration laws, semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung says that the figure for the first half of 2007 show a decline of more than 53 percent compared to the same period last year. The province experiencing the largest drop in the number of new citizens was Lower Austria with 64.2 percent fewer than the previous year. At the other end of the scale, Vorarlberg registered 30.6 percent fewer naturalized citizens in the first half of 2007. In absolute terms, Vienna welcomed 2,871 new Austrians followed by Upper Austria. The lowest number of new Austrians was registered in the province of Burgenland, where there were only 137. The previous OeVP-FP0e/BZOe coalition government had imposed restrictions on immigration and made it more difficult for people to receive Austrian citizenship.

## Judiciary Closes in on Westenthaler

13. The Vienna Public Prosecutor is urging the Austrian Parliament to lift BZOe boss Peter Westenthaler's parliamentary immunity. Westenthaler has come under suspicion of having given false testimony in connection with the so-called "brawl process," in which one of the BZOe boss's former bodyguards was convicted of having beaten up the press spokesperson of former Justice Minister Karin Gastinger (BZOe).

Following a first investigation of the fact connected with the so-called "brawl case," in which BZOe boss Peter Westenthaler has come under suspicion of having given false testimony, the Vienna Public Prosecutor has now urged for Westenthaler's immunity to be lifted. This is a request, which, according to ORF online news, the Austrian Parliament usually meets provided that the allegations are not connected to the suspect's political activities. Parliamentary approval of the Prosecutor's request is necessary in order to actually bring charges against Westenthaler, ORF online news explains. Should this happen, and the BZOe boss be found guilty of false testimony, he may be facing a prison term of up to three years.

## EU to Resume Gaza Fuel Payments

14. The European Union has said it will resume fuel aid payments to the only power plant in the Gaza Strip today on a provisional basis. Payments had been cut off last week because of concerns that the Islamist group Hamas was planning to tax electricity bills. The dispute had left hundreds of thousands of Palestinians without electricity, says ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal. Critical CIA Report Published

15. An internal CIA report has been made public that accuses the agency of failing to tackle Al Qaeda before the September 11 attacks six years ago. The release of the document, which was completed in 2005, was ordered by Congress. The CIA's Inspector General's report is highly critical of former agency chief George Tenet, saying he had no anti-terrorist strategy. Analysts meanwhile say there were enough warnings of the threat posed at the time by Al Qaeda. Following the publication of an internal CIA report, centrist daily Die Presse writes that former agency chief George Tenet, while recognizing the threat posed by Al Qaeda even before September 11, 2001, failed to act and prepare the intelligence services of the challenges they were facing in connection with the terrorist group.

Similarly, independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten in its online edition quotes from the report, which argues the CIA had failed to cooperate effectively with other intelligence services. This had led to the "systematic breakdown" of early warning mechanisms that might have protected the US from the infiltration of terrorist suspects. ORF online news says that according to the report, the competition and the consequent lack of cooperation between the CIA and the NSA in particular had led to a series of omissions and failures, without which it might have been possible to prevent the September 11 attacks.

## Iran, IAEA Report Progress on Nuclear Issue

16. Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) say they have reached agreement on a plan to help deal with Western suspicions that Tehran is seeking nuclear weapons. The agreement involves a timetable to resolve outstanding questions about Iran's nuclear program. IAEA Deputy Director Ollie Heinonen emphasized the agreement is a "milestone," reports liberal daily Der Standard. McCaw